



MKS Toolkit Case Study

Primark

This global financial information services company ported two million lines of source code in 1600 source modules onto Microsoft Windows in just months with help from MKS Toolkit for Enterprise Developers (formerly NuTCRACKER), the powerful UNIX and Windows interoperability solution from MKS, Inc., a Microsoft Certified Solution Provider.

In common with other industries, the financial dealing sector adopted computing technology long ago. But the fast-moving nature of the business—where processing delays and errors can literally cost millions—means that this community is more sensitive to enhanced performance than many others.

Primark is a company that specializes in investment fund management, providing technology for its customers. One of Primark's most significant products is Icon, a software system that provides accounting, valuation, and management reporting for institutional funds. Operating in real time, Icon's accounting system is specifically designed to manage securities and currencies within unit trusts, unit-linked insurance funds, investment trusts, pensions, and life assurance funds. In other words, Icon is relevant to a highly specialized, targeted group of companies—who in turn have the responsibility of managing huge sums of money for their customers.

Typically, within the larger companies using Icon, it is deployed on an IBM RS6000 or Compaq OpenVMS server. For smaller companies, Primark has deployed the software within a SCO UNIX environment.

Customer demand for Icon within a Windows environment is increasing, and Primark made the decision in 1999 to investigate the production of a Windows based version.

Migration—as opposed to rewriting—was the best solution given Primark's desire to retain a single source code base for all platforms. Icon is a complex product written in C with in excess of two million lines of source code in 1600 source modules. So how to port it reliably?

No Room for Mistakes

Investment managers are obviously under a great deal of pressure to manage their customers' investments properly—moral pressure, plus a more tangible legal obligation to fulfill transactions within a rigid regulatory framework. This puts Icon into the "mission-critical" bracket. Any ported version had to be as reliable as and functionally identical to the original, with no margin for error.

Icon Technical Consultant James Warbis began to evaluate the market for suitable porting tools. "Too many of the products I looked at were worryingly 'beta-ish'—they just didn't really inspire much confidence. I then read a number of reports, including a testimonial from the U.S. Navy, about a product called NuTCRACKER

Company Profile

Primark Corporation, headquartered in Waltham, MA, is a \$500 million global information services company that collects, integrates, and delivers financial, economic and market research information. The company serves financial, corporate and government decision-makers in 61 countries through 86 offices in 24 countries.

Situation

One of Primark's most significant products is Icon, a software system that provides accounting, valuation, and management reporting for institutional funds. Customer demand for Icon within a Windows environment is increasing, and Primark made the decision in 1999 to investigate the production of a Windows based version. Migration—as opposed to rewriting—was the best solution given Primark's desire to retain a single source code base for all platforms. So how to port it reliably?

Business Solution

Icon Technical Consultant James Warbis began to evaluate the market for suitable porting tools. Warbis made contact with Scientific Computers (SCL), an MKS partner in the UK—and liked what he saw. By early February Primark had an evaluation copy. The decision to purchase NuTCRACKER was a straightforward one as a result of Warbis's evaluation.



from MKS that seemed to satisfy my concerns about being able to handle mission-critical applications."

Warbis made contact with MKS partners, Scientific Computers (SCL), in the UK—and liked what he saw. "SCL was able to demonstrate an explicit update and product release schedule, which made me feel comfortable with its ongoing development. The supporting documentation was wide-ranging and comprehensive."

By early February Primark had an evaluation copy. Although confident in his initial choice, Warbis understandably felt a little apprehensive at the beginning of the evaluation project proper. "But NuTCRACKER was easy to install and I was soon very happy with it. The compilation of 150 sample source files went smoothly, and the port worked without a hitch—much easier than I ever expected, probably taking only 12 to 15 hours to get the core of the application up and running."

The decision to purchase NuTCRACKER was a straightforward one as a result of Warbis's evaluation. Bearing in mind the initial evaluation was in early February, the first customer-facing implementation took place in April. "That's how confident we were with the resulting ported version of Icon. The port went according to plan, and small problems were easily solved using the excellent online documentation; Scientific Computers provided excellent technical support on the more complex issues," comments Warbis.

"When we considered our options in porting Icon to Windows, we estimated that a complete rewrite of Icon's code would take about 12 months' worth of man hours. That jeopardized the payback on the new platform. In terms of time and cost, the solution provided by MKS, Scientific Computers, and the NuTCRACKER product made it the obvious route."

With two successful customer implementations of the Windows based version under its belt, Primark is now looking forward to the new year—and the new millennium—when it can seek new business with the Windows version of Icon.

Benefits

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